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COMPARISON OF PERFORMANCE BY "FLES" PROGRAM STUDENTS AND REGULAR FRENCH III STUDENTS ON MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION TESTS.

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THE EFFECT OF EXPOSURE TO FRENCH IN THE ELEMENTARY GRADES (FLES) ON LATER LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY AND PERFORMANCE IN FRENCH COURSES IN HIGH SCHOOL WAS EVALUATED. ONE GROUP OF 17 HAD BEEN GIVEN ABOUT 1 HOUR A WEEK OF AUDIOLINGUAL TRAINING BEGINNING IN GRADE 3. THE OTHER GROUP OF 15 BEGAN FRENCH IN GRADE 9. BOTH GROUPS WERE ADMINISTERED THE MLA COOPERATIVE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEST (LEVEL M) WHICH SAMPLES ACHIEVEMENT IN SPEAKING, READING, WRITING, AND COMPREHENSION. THE FLES GROUP PERFORMED SIGNIFICANTLY BETTER ON ALL FOUR OF THE MLA TESTS. SINCE THE FLES TRAINING EMPHASIZES SPEAKING AND LISTENING, IT WAS NOT SUPRISING THAT THE FLES GROUP WAS SUPERIOR ON THESE TESTS. IT IS SIGNIFICANT THAT THE FLES GROUP WAS ALSO SUPERIOR ON TESTS OF READING AND WRITING, ALL OF WHICH LENDS SUPPORT TO THE VALUE OF FLES TRAINING ON LATER PERFORMANCE IN HIGH SCHOOL FRENCH. BECAUSE OF THE SMALL NUMBER OF SUBJECTS AND BECAUSE THE MEAN IQ FOR THE FLES GROUP (141) WAS SIGNIFICANTLY HIGHER THAN THE MEAN IQ FOR THE REGULAR GROUP (128), GENERALIZATION FROM THESE FINDINGS IS LIMITED. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION CONVENTION (FEBRUARY 1965) AND IS REPRINTED FROM "THE FRENCH REVIEW," VOLUME 39, NUMBER 3, DECEMBER 1965. (AUTHOR)

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Comparison of Performance by "FLES" Program Students and Regular French III Students on Modern Language Association Tests[1]

by Evelyn Brega & John M. Newell

ALTHOUGH THE TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES in the public schools has a long history, the extensive use of the "audio-lingual" (aural-oral) method, particularly in the elementary grades, has emerged in the past two decades. The shift from emphasis on grammar-translation to the audio-lingual approach reflects a feeling by language instructors that the latter approach is a more realistic program for the teaching of foreign languages. The extension of the teaching of foreign languages, particularly French, into the elementary grades is based on the concept that the assimilation of new speech patterns is easier at a younger age. The expansion of commerce with foreign countries and the development of the Peace Corps have also provided impetus for the teaching of foreign languages in the public schools.

Relatively little research has been done to evaluate the effect of the FLES (Foreign Language-Elementary School) programs on later language skills. Proponents of the FLES program feel that beginning the study of a foreign language in the elementary grades will result in superior performance in high school language courses. The evaluation of such progress typically includes measures of four skills: speaking, reading, writing, and comprehension. The superiority of the audio-lingual approach in the development of these four skills has been questioned. Agard and Dunkel[2] reported that students exposed to the audio-lingual method showed less proficiency in reading than did conventionally trained students. These authors also

[1] Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Convention, February, 1965.

[2] F. B. Agard and H. B. Dunkel, *An Investigation of Second-Language Teaching* (Boston, 1948), p. 289.

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reported that the audio-lingual students were less able to understand spoken language on a recording by a native speaker, than were conventionally trained students. They did report superior pronunciation skills and apparent higher motivation in the audio-lingual students.

No clear superiority in performance of students trained by a "foreign-born" instructor when compared to students trained by a "native-born" instructor has been demonstrated so far as we know. On the other hand, Carroll[3] held: "It hardly needs research demonstration that the competence of the teacher in the foreign language will have an important bearing on the success of the instruction. . . ." The emphasis on intensive background in the foreign language as well as skills in teaching has led to the recruitment of "language specialists" in the schools. These individuals may be assigned full-time to teaching the foreign language in the elementary schools. The addition of such specialists to the school staff results in increased salary expenditures and questions have been raised as to the value of such an investment.

The present study is an attempt by one school system, Lexington, to evaluate the effect of the FLES program on foreign language proficiency in high school. Because many factors could not be controlled adequately, generalizations from the present study are limited. However, few studies are available which compare the performance of two groups of students in high school French, only one of which has been exposed to the elementary French program.

Before describing the actual study, a brief description of the Lexington French program is in order. The Elementary French Program was inaugurated in the Fall of 1952. At that time, only the academically superior students were enrolled in the Program which began in grade three. While this restriction has been eliminated in Lexington, the selection of only academically able students for FLES training is not unusual in school systems. In grades three through six, the Language Program consisted of one hour a week of audio-lingual instruction. In grades five and six, there were two periods a week, each thirty minutes in length. Reading was introduced in grade five, and writing was introduced in grade six. Although the students in this Program were exposed to several different instructors, all teachers in the Program had above average to superior backgrounds in French. Changes in the FLES Program which resulted partly from data presented in this paper will be indicated.

In the Fall of 1963, those students who first entered the FLES program in grade three had reached the eleventh grade and had completed two years of high school French in addition to the elementary school program. *This*

[3] J. B. Carroll, "Research on teaching foreign languages." *Handbook on Research on Teaching*, ed. N. L. Gage (Chicago, 1963), ch. 21, p. 1093.

Table 1

Median Scores on MLA Tests for Regular French III, French 11(FLES) and National Normative Groups

Measure	French III	French 11 (FLES)	National
N	15	17	—
Mean IQ	128.40	141.82	—
Listening	20	34	23
Speaking	43	68	38
Reading	37	42	30
Writing	50	78	50

group is designated as French 11 (*eleven*). A second group of students began French in high school and had completed two years of French, but had not been exposed to French in the elementary grades. *This group is designated as French III* (*three*).

All of the students in the present study were enrolled in the third year of high school French. The senior author of the present paper served as the instructor for both groups. The two groups represented two different classes in French. Seventeen students were enrolled in the French 11 class, and fifteen students were enrolled in the French III section. In order to evaluate the level of proficiency of the students, the Modern Language Association Cooperative Foreign Language Test, Level M(French) was used. This test samples achievement in four areas; speaking, reading, writing, and comprehension. This test was administered in the Spring of 1964. In addition to the subjective judgments of the instructor, the IQ of each student was obtained using the Otis Quick Scoring Test, Form MA.

The specific question with which this study deals is the effect of exposure to French in the elementary grades (FLES) on performance in a high school French course. The performance of a group of students who were exposed to the Elementary French Program on four MLA Foreign Language Tests was compared to the performance on the same tests by a group who had not been exposed to the FLES program. Table 1 presents the basic data for both groups. The FLES group performed significantly better on all four MLA tests than did the group who began French in high school. Analysis of the differences in the raw scores of the two groups on each of the four MLA tests using the Median Test[4] indicates that the differences in performance are significant beyond the .001 level. More specifically, on only two of the four tests did as many as two of the fifteen students in the regular French III group obtain scores which exceed the combined median score.

[4] S. Siegel, *Nonparametric Statistics for the Behavioral Sciences* (New York, 1956), pp. 111–116.

Table 2
Correlation Coefficients (Spearman) Between IQ and MLA Tests Scores for French III and French 11 groups

Measure	French III	French 11
Listening	0.78	0.06
Speaking	0.78	0.31
Reading	0.79	0.18
Writing	0.75	0.04

It is interesting to note that the median raw scores on all four MLA tests for the FLES group exceeds the median scores for the national normative group. The median raw scores for the regular French III group met or exceeded the national norm group's median scores on three tests, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. The median raw score on the MLA test on Speaking for the FLES group greatly exceeds the scores for both the regular French III group and a normative group. Since emphasis in the elementary French program is based on the aural-oral approach, with emphasis on speaking French, this superior performance reflects the result of such training. It should be indicated that although writing skills were not introduced until grade six for the FLES group, their performance greatly exceeds the performance of the other two groups on this test. The instructor for the FLES group reports that it was her impression that this group exhibited far greater facility in understanding the language and expressing itself in it in class. This impression appears to be supported by the test results.

As indicated earlier, when the Elementary French Program was introduced in Lexington, only children who were above average academically were selected for the program. It is not surprising to find the mean IQ for the FLES group significantly higher than the mean IQ of the regular French III group. The difference in IQ scores of 13.42 points between the two groups is significant beyond the .01 level ($t = 4.23$). This difference in IQ scores between the two groups becomes of greater interest when we examine the correlation between IQ and the scores on each of the four MLA tests. Table 2 summarizes these correlations. Examination of Table 2 indicates that the correlation between IQ and each of the four MLA tests is significant beyond the .01 level for the regular French III group, but no significant correlation between IQ and the MLA test scores was found for the French 11 (FLES) group.

Clear interpretation of the data from Table 2 is difficult. Carroll[5] has pointed out that the correlation between IQ and language ability is not generally high. For the French III group, a significant relationship between

[5] J. B. Carroll, *loc. cit.*

IQ scores and scores on the four MLA tests exists. On the other hand, the lack of significant correlations for the French 11 group, while in agreement with Carroll's viewpoint, may be a statistical artifact due to a restricted score range on the MLA tests. Pearson product-moment correlations were developed for the French 11 group and then corrected for restriction of range.[6] The Spearman rank-order correlations were corrected for ties in ranking.[7] In both cases, the correlation which resulted from such corrective measures was not increased greatly. For example, the 0.31 correlation between IQ score and score on the MLA test for Speaking, when corrected, became 0.38 and 0.33.

Despite the statistical limitations of the present study because of small sample size and apparent restriction in score range, it is difficult to believe that the superiority of the French 11 group on the four MLA tests can be accounted for primarily because of higher IQ scores. The instructor for the French 11 group reports that the enthusiasm and "feel" for the language was not possessed by the other group. While the evaluation of the effects of a FLES program as a motivational device is difficult, subjective impressions of instructors tend to reflect the feeling that FLES groups are more motivated in learning the language.

Within the limitations of the study, the data presented suggest that programs in French which begin in the elementary grades have a significant effect on later performance in high school French courses. While such FLES programs typically emphasize speaking and listening ability on the part of the student, it is worth noting that the MLA test scores for Reading and Writing were also significantly higher for the FLES group than for the French III group. On the basis of the present data, exposure to a FLES program appears to provide the student with a much broader and comprehensive proficiency with the language.

The French Program in Lexington has been adapted to include many more students than were originally involved. This change reflects the feeling that knowledge of a foreign language is no longer a cultural asset for the elite, but an economic, practical, cultural necessity for the majority of the pupils. There are restrictions which will prevent a particular student from becoming involved in the FLES program. A reading handicap which indicates weakness in auditory discrimination, phonics, and structural analysis is dealt with better through remedial reading programs rather than exposure to a foreign language. For these children, introduction to a foreign language can begin in junior or senior high school.

As a final note, it should be indicated that the Foreign Language Program

[6] J. P. Guilford, *Fundamental Statistics in Psychology and Education* (New York, 1956), pp. 189.

[7] S. Siegel, *loc. cit.*

in the elementary schools in Lexington is developed around the availability of an instructor who has an above average background in French. It would be of considerable interest to compare such a program with one where the language training revolves around a television presentation of the language lesson and a follow-up by the regular classroom teacher.

In summation, the present study is focused on the effect of a FLES program in French on later performance in a high school language course. Two groups of students, one exposed to a FLES program, and one which began French in high school, were administered the Modern Language Association French tests at the end of their third year French course. Results indicate significant superiority in Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing for the FLES group. Significant correlations between IQ and MLA test scores were found for the non-FLES group but no significant correlations were found for the FLES group. These results are discussed, and changes in the Lexington Program are in progress. Need for future research is also indicated.

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